

Remarks at an International Women's Day Reception

March 8, 2010

Thank you, everybody. Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you, everybody. Please have a seat. Let me begin by just thanking some of the people who are participating here today. Michelle mentioned my outstanding Cabinet members, the extraordinary Members of Congress, and people who are in our senior White House team.

I also want to thank Ms. Kerry Washington for emceeding today. Give Kerry a big round of applause. Where is she? There she is. Ms. Katharine McPhee, who's going to be performing a song in the program—where's Katharine? She's around. She's practicing, getting her—she's here; I just saw her. Secretary Madeleine Albright is here today. And Ms. Mozhdah Jamalzadah is also going to be here performing a song in the program, so we want to thank her. Give her a big round of applause.

And there—then there's this lady here. [*Laughter*] FLOTUS, that's what we call her—FLOTUS. [*Laughter*] She is—I'm biased, I acknowledge, but I think she's a pretty good First Lady. Don't you think? She's pretty good. And I'm very sincere when I look at you adoringly. [*Laughter*] Yes.

Now, the story of America over the past 200 years—past 233 years is one of laws becoming more just, of a people becoming more equal, of a union being perfected. It's a story of captives being set free and a movement to fulfill the promise of that freedom. It's a story of waves of weary travelers reconsecrating America as a nation of immigrants. It's a story of our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters making the most of that most American of demands, to be treated the same as everybody else. And it's a story of women, from those on the *Mayflower* to the one I'm blessed to call my wife, who looked across the dinner table and thought, I'm smarter than that guy. [*Laughter*]

The story of America's women, like the story of America itself, has had its peaks and valleys. But as one of our great American educators once said, if you drew a line through all the valleys and all the peaks, that line would be drawn with an upward curve. That upward curve—what we call progress—didn't happen by accident.

It came about because of daring, indomitable women. Women like Abigail Adams, who brought on the ridicule of her husband John by advising him to "remember the ladies" in our founding documents. Women like the pioneers and settlers who, in the words of one, said, "I thought, where he could go, I could go." Women like Dorothy Height and Sylvia Mendez and Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem and Sandra Day O'Connor and Madeleine Albright, upending assumptions and changing laws and tearing down barriers. Women like Hillary Rodham Clinton, who, throughout her career, has put millions of cracks in America's glass ceiling. And it's because of them and so many others—many who aren't recorded in the history books—that the story of America is ultimately one of hope and one of progress, of a upward journey.

But even as we reflect on the hope of our history, we must also face squarely the reality of the present, a reality marked by unfairness, marked by hardship for too many women in America. The statistics of inequality are all too familiar to us: how women just earn 77 cents for every dollar men make; how one in four women is the victim of domestic violence at some

point in her life; how women are more than half the population, but make up only 17 percent of the seats in Congress and less than 3 percent of Fortune 500 CEOs.

These and any number of other facts and figures reflect the fundamental truth that in 2010, full gender equality has not yet been achieved, that the task of perfecting America goes on, and that all of us, men and women, have a part to play in bending the arc in America's story upward in the 21st century.

Now, I'm proud of the extraordinary women—and the extraordinary Americans—I've appointed to help take up this task. In addition to our outstanding Secretary of State, we've got Hilda Solis serving where the first female Cabinet Secretary, Frances Perkins, once served, at the Labor Department. We've got Kathleen Sebelius leading our Health and Human Services Department; Janet Napolitano running the Department of Homeland Security. Susan Rice is our Ambassador to the United Nations. The Chair of my Council of Economic Advisers is Christy Romer. We got Lisa Jackson, who's doing great work at the EPA.

We have just extraordinary talent all across this administration. And from health insurance reform to climate and energy to matters of domestic policy, I'm seeking the counsel of brilliant women. And that list doesn't include, by the way, the Justice I appointed to the Supreme Court, Ms. Sonia Sotomayor.

So, yes, I'm very proud to have appointed so many brilliant women to so many essential posts in our Government. But I'm even prouder of what each of them is doing, and what all of us are doing, to make life better in America and around the world, because lifting up the prospects of our daughters will require all of us doing our part. And that's why we've established a new White House Council on Women and Girls, chaired by my friend and senior adviser, Valerie Jarrett, that will help make sure that every part of our Government is working to address the challenges faced by women and girls.

At a time when women are on the verge of making up the majority of America's workforce, the very first bill I signed into law—a bill named after Lilly Ledbetter—was designed to help keep America's promise: If you do the same work as a man, you ought to be paid the same wage as a man. To help parents balance work and family, we're offering States more support for quality, affordable child care and paid family leave.

At a time when we are waging two wars and fighting a global network of hatred and violence, we need the service of all those patriotic Americans who are willing to do their part. And that's why Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mullen and top Navy officers decided to end an old barrier against women so our skilled and brave Navy women, as well as men, can serve on submarines.

At a time when it's still legal for health insurance companies to discriminate against the victims of domestic violence in eight States plus the District of Columbia, we're seeking health insurance reforms that would finally rein in the worst practices of the insurance industry. And I'm also proud to note that I've appointed the first White House Adviser on Violence Against Women, Lynn Rosenthal.

At a time when the jobs of tomorrow will go to workers with the knowledge and skills to do them, we're ramping up efforts to educate our young people in science and technology, engineering and math, and we're making a special effort to recruit women to those fields, because I want to see more teenage astronomers like Caroline Moore. In fact, Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood has launched a new partnership with Spelman College to train women engineers and help put them to work rebuilding our highways and our infrastructure.

And since today happens to be International Women's Day, it's also worth mentioning what Secretary Clinton and Ambassador Rice and this administration are doing on behalf of women around the globe. We lifted what's called the global gag rule that restricted women's access to family planning services abroad. We're pursuing a global health strategy that makes important investments in child and maternal health. We sponsored a U.N. resolution to increase protection for women and girls in conflict-torn countries to help make it possible for more women like Mozhdah, who traveled from Afghanistan to join us here today, to reach for their dreams. We created the first Office of Global Women's Issues at the State Department and appointed Ambassador Melanne Verwee to run it. We're investing \$18 million to combat the unconscionable cruelties being committed against girls and women in the Democratic Republic of Congo. And next month, I'll host an entrepreneurship summit to help fulfill a commitment I made in Cairo, a summit that will focus, in part, on the challenges facing women entrepreneurs in Muslim communities around the world.

We're doing all of this not only because promoting women's empowerment is one of the best ways to promote economic development and economic success, we are doing it because it's the right thing to do. I say that not only as a President but also as the father of two daughters, as a son and a grandson, and as a husband.

Growing up, I saw my mother dedicate most of her life to promoting the rights and well-being of women overseas, to empowering them to take more control over their economic lives and be able to empower their families as well. I saw my grandmother work her way up to become vice president at a bank in Hawaii—starting as a secretary, never had more than a high school education. But I also saw how she hit a glass ceiling and had to watch as men no more qualified than she was rise up the corporate ladder.

Before we got to the White House—where we are grateful for the extraordinary support that we receive from the White House staff—I'd see the challenges Michelle faced as a working mom. And as usual, she handled it with grace and skill, but she'd be the first one to tell you it wasn't always easy balancing the responsibilities of being a hospital executive with those of being a mother and sometimes worrying about the girls when she was at work and sometimes worrying about work when she was with the girls.

And today, as I see Sasha and Malia getting older, I think about the world that they and all of America's daughters will inherit. And I think about all the opportunities that are still beyond the reach for too many young women and too many of our brothers and—too many of our sisters and mothers and aunts, all of the glass ceilings that have yet to be shattered.

We have so much more work to do, and that's why we're here today. I think about this because it reminds me of why I'm here. I didn't run for President so that the dreams of our daughters could be deferred or denied. I didn't run for President to see inequality and injustice persist in our time. I ran for President to put the same rights, the same opportunities, the same dreams within the reach of our daughters and our sons alike. I ran for President to put the American Dream within the reach of all of our people, no matter what their gender or race or faith or station.

And if we can stay true to that cause, if we can stay true to our founding ideals, then I'm absolutely confident that the line that runs through America's story will, in the future, as it has in the past, be drawn with an upward curve. And I'm especially pleased that these young ladies are here today, because they're the ones who are going to help bend that curve towards justice and equality.

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:52 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to entertainers Kerry Washington, Katharine McPhee, and Mozhdah Jamalzadah; former Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright; civil rights activists Dorothy I. Height and Sylvia Mendez; women's rights activist Gloria M. Steinem; former Supreme Court Associate Justice Sandra Day O'Connor; and Lilly Ledbetter, former employee, Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady, who introduced the President.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : International Women's Day reception.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Albright, Madeleine K.; Clinton, Hillary Rodham; Height, Dorothy I.; Jackson, Lisa P.; Jamalzadah, Mozhdah; Jarrett, Valerie B.; LaHood, Ray H.; Ledbetter, Lilly; McPhee, Katharine; Mendez, Sylvia; Moore, Caroline; Mullen, Michael G.; Napolitano, Janet A.; Obama, Malia; Obama, Michelle; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; O'Connor, Sandra Day; Rice, Susan E.; Romer, Christina D.; Rosenthal, Lynn; Sebelius, Kathleen; Solis, Hilda L.; Sotomayor, Sonia; Steinem, Gloria M.; Verveer, Melanne; Washington, Kerry.

Subjects: Afghanistan : Women, status of; Business and industry : Wage discrimination; Civil rights : Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons, equality; Civil rights : Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009; Civil rights : Minorities :: African-American civil rights movement; Civil rights : Racial equality; Civil rights : Wage equality; Civil rights : Women's rights and gender equality; Congo, Democratic Republic of the : Civil war and ethnic conflict; Congo, Democratic Republic of the : Women's rights; Defense, Department of : Joint Chiefs of Staff; Developing countries : Health and medical care, promotion efforts; Development, U.S. Agency for International : Mexico City Policy, rescission of; Economic Advisers, Council of; Education : Science and math programs; Environmental Protection Agency : Administrator; Foreign policy, U.S. : Women's rights; Health and Human Services, Department of : Secretary; Health and medical care : Health insurance reforms, proposed; Health and medical care : Insurance coverage and access to providers; Homeland Security, Department of : Secretary; Judiciary : Supreme Court :: Associate Justice; Law enforcement and crime : Domestic violence; Labor, Department of : Secretary; Navy, Department of the : Submarines, lifting of ban on female crewmembers; State, Department of : Global Women's Issues, Office of; State, Department of : Secretary; Transportation, Department of : Secretary; United Nations : U.S. Permanent Representative; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: Violence Against Women, Adviser on; White House Office : Women and Girls, White House Council on; Women's Day, International.

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